

# **“Voices from the Field” Observations and Comments on Early Childhood Education and Care No Child Left Behind**

**Prepared by Tom Grogan  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
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This document summarizes thoughts and impressions on the federal No Child Left Behind Act received from broad cross sections of Wisconsin’s early childhood education and care community. Input came in the form of responses to survey questions and other evaluative and ranking exercises that were undertaken in the spring and summer of 2006.<sup>1</sup>

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<p><i>Part One</i> <i>NCLB impact on early childhood education and care</i></p>
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1. NCLB funding has had an impact, indirectly yet definitely, on such programs as Title 1, Headstart, and Family Literacy. NCLB should be fully funded and NCLB funds should prioritize and provide support for early childhood education and care. The

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the data was collected using the group brainstorming process of the ehuddle product ([www.ehuddle.com](http://www.ehuddle.com)). The exception to that rule came from an effort that Jill Haglund previously facilitated. Jill Haglund collected information on the impact of NCLB on Teaching at a session held on March 31, 2006. ("Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How Our Children Really Learn," Presentation on March 31, 2006.) There were approximately 104 total responses to that question (raw data is available). I digested that information down to a listing of 31 items that were presented on the assessment survey.

For the other data, ehuddle basically created a group brainstorming website for individuals to submit ideas or answers to the questions that were posed. The existence of this website was then publicized through various emails that Jill Haglund sent to individuals and discussion groups focusing on early childhood education and care. All of that raw data was reviewed. It was rewritten and reorganized for clarity and stylistic purposes. (All of the raw data is available.) The list of ideas for each question were then put in alphabetic order for evaluation by a "scoring committee." Members of that committee were identified through two means - first the ehuddle survey allowed people to "self select in." A second method was the identification of key individuals (by title and function) that Jill Haglund created. These two lists were merged, and an invitation to the resulting 20 individuals was then issued to participate in an anonymous survey through survey monkey product ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). A total of 15 participants helped to sort and prioritize the data, as presented in the two papers.

focus on early intervention is desirable. The focus on ensuring qualified teachers is desirable. We need to guard against an uneven implementation of various concepts.

2. There should be a focus on the health of children. Students must be healthy to be ready to learn. Parents should be encouraged to have regular checkups for their children.
3. There should be a focus on the importance of early education, but care should be taken to ensure that it does not distort the curriculum or create unrealistic expectations (by schools, teachers, or parents). NCLB should help to create awareness and recognition of the importance of the foundation of skills and learning through early education. However, attention must be given to the problem that federal requirements can change how teachers establish requirements or expectations that that “high stakes” testing can create unwanted pressures to succeed before the child is fully able to perform at that level.
4. NCLB’s focus on academic skills is not developmentally appropriate for young children; it has created age-inappropriate academic pressure on children. NCLB’s focus on testing forces/encourages teaching methods that deny discovery and learning. Furthermore, the time spent on testing is time taken away from other activities (such as, hands-on or play-based learning).
5. An emphasis on the importance of reading is desirable; however, many preschoolers are not ready to read. Reading readiness skills must be strengthened in a play-based environment. Similarly, NCLB’s accountability expectations may have an undesirable impact on efforts to meet the special needs of children with disabilities.
6. NCLB’s focus on student achievement helps to improve student learning while also documenting the extent of the achievement gap and the need for high-quality educational programs and opportunities for all students.

*Part Two*

*Desirable NCLB modifications relating to early childhood education and care*

1. NCLB should ensure that early care and education providers receive appropriate professional development opportunities.
2. NCLB should ensure that parents receive support, encouragement, and resources to participate actively in their child's learning.
3. NCLB must reinforce, not hinder, best practices, particularly using age- and developmentally-appropriate approaches. The emphasis of testing should be reexamined: NCLB must find creative and instructionally sound ways measure student achievement to use standardized testing, and to hold schools accountable.

4. NCLB must focus on child development by encouraging a holistic focus on meeting and advancing the educational, emotional, health, and social needs of children. NCLB should invest more in the advancement of literacy for our disadvantaged children
5. NCLB must encourage and provide incentives for the formation and support of mutually-beneficial partnerships among all existing agencies (local, county and state) and accredited childcare centers. NCLB should help to establish systems to rate or measure program quality and provide the means to help programs to improve.
6. NCLB should help to strengthen and improve compensation levels for early childhood education and care professionals.
7. NCLB should address the achievement gap that already exists by preschool age (low income/low literacy children at ages 3 and 4 are already behind). Unfortunately, some children will never be able to meet the benchmarks that are set even with a great deal of intervention. Furthermore, NCLB should address the issue of providing early childhood education and care for homeless preschool children

### *Part Three*

#### *Major NCLB policy initiatives relating to early childhood education and care*

1. State and federal programs must work in harmony to provide affordable access to high quality early learning opportunities. Early childhood education and care should be a priority, by providing additional funding for these programs also ensuring that the approaches used are developmentally appropriate.
2. Assessment does not need to always be standardized. Progress and growth can be shown in other ways using criterion-referenced assessment tools that are backed with quality observational data along with family input. We should use alternative testing measures for preschool, kindergarten and first grade children. We should use external evaluation to assess program quality.
3. We need to acknowledge and provide greater recognize and remuneration those individuals would provide leadership and administer or direct programs for young children.

### *Part Four*

#### *Impact of NCLB on teaching (early childhood education and care)*

1. NCLB changes what teachers do, how they do it, and why they do it. This results in less time for teacher preparation time and reduced flexibility relating to the balance between instruction and activity.
2. NCLB is helping to create forces or pressures to teach “pre-academics” for students who are too young. This focus on teaching shortchanges other types of learning that

should be taking place: interpersonal communication, social awareness, emotional growth, love of learning, creativity, problem solving and thinking.

3. NCLB creates testing pressures that reduce time for teaching, learning, sharing and growing. Preparation for testing changes how students are taught – there is more of a focus on rote instruction and drill learning.
4. The focus on testing leads to efforts to document outcomes or to be able to meet the expectations for specific learning. This focus on outcomes poses problems – it distorts learning and can frustrate the developmental process for younger children.